

Duxbury sailors take home yacht prize

By STEVE WOODWORTH
SPECIAL TO THE CLIPPER

Dave Caso and his crew aboard his Cherubini 44, Silhouette, have again won their class in the grueling Marion Bermuda Cruising Yacht Race contested between June 19 and June 25.

This was the 17th running of this classic, biennial ocean race sponsored jointly by the Beverly Yacht Club (of Marion, Massachusetts), the Royal Hamilton Amateur Dinghy Club, and Blue Water Sailing. The 645 nautical mile race started just after noon on Friday, June 19, outside Marion's Sippican Harbor amidst drizzle, fog, and some 12 to 15 knots of wind from the southwest.

Because of weather and, presumably, the current economic crisis, the usual roaster of 75 to 80 boats in prior years was down to 50 boats competing in four classes, which divided boats by size and speed potential. Silhouette competed in Class D with 11 other boats.

In the 2007 race Caso and crew captured a variety of trophies, including Class winner and overall winner. The hope among all aboard, of course, was to repeat this admirable feat.

Based upon weather predictions and projections as to gulf stream activity Caso and his navigator, Sam Lawson chose not to sail in a straight line directly to Bermuda but, rather, to go west of this "rumble line" in an effort to capitalize upon favorable currents.

What Caso, and the rest of the fleet, saw on this westerly route is what some have described as a "mini perfect storm" as two low pressure systems converged to produce winds in excess of 40 knots (over 50 m.p.h.) and towering seas, sometimes reaching 25 feet in height. So significant was this weather system that only three of the 12 boats in Silhouette's class actually finished the race. Overall, 19 of the boats that were originally scheduled to start either withdrew before the start or threw in the towel at some point dur-

ing the race. Ripped sails, broken halyards, and assorted hull damage was the order of the day. Perhaps the most significant damage was to a sailboat racing in A Fleet when the impact of a large wave caused the vessel's fuel tank to rupture, filling the living quarters with some 50 gallons of diesel fuel and shorting out numerous on-board electronic components. In a post race moment, the skipper of a boat competing in Class B was seen to breakdown in uncontrollable sobs of relief simply to be ashore.

With a combination of seamanship and tenacity Silhouette's crew was able to get the boat through, mostly unscathed, and cross the finish line off Saint David's Light-house in Bermuda Thursday morning, June 25. Once the calculations were done to ap-

ply the various boats' handicaps Silhouette "corrected out" to first place in its class.

In addition to Sam Lawson, Caso's crew also included Sam's daughter Eleanor, who at 23 has already completed 7 Bermuda races. Ned Lawson, Terry Watson, and Keith Pratt rounded out the Silhouette crew.

Shawn Dahlen, and crew aboard the Beneteau 423, Attitude, finished sixth in class shortly after 5 p.m. on Thursday. Dahlen won the Beneteau Award for the best finish by a Beneteau brand boat. Six of the 13 boats in Class C were unable to endure the rigors of the weather system and retired from the race. Crewmember Keith Fotta commented "this isn't sailboat racing - it's surviving in the right direction."

Skipper Dahlen and his

navigator, Steve Woodworth, and weather specialist Mark Lindquist all concurred that the westerly route to the island made the most sense as it would facilitate the best entrance to and exit from the Gulf Stream.

The weather encountered on this route, however, had foredeck crew Andre Martecchini and Steve Trehu frequently scrambling to the front of the boat and, on one occasion up the mast to repair broken lines and to repeatedly change sails. The weather conditions and the length of the race gave rise to many an on-board vow "this is my last race." Ashore and two or three Dark 'n Stormies later, however, plans were already being hatched for the next Bermuda race.



Dave Caso and the crew of the Silhouette after winning the Marion-Bermuda Cruising Yacht Race in their class. The boat was one of only three in its class to finish the race due to rough weather.



Shawn Dahlen with the crew of the Silhouette. Dahlen and his crew finished sixth in class in the race.